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Chapter 10

Superstition and Enlightenment:

Engagements Between Theology and Anthropology

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This chapter explores some uncertainties arising from the question of what theology might contribute to social anthropology. It offers reflections on the proposal by Joel Robbins in "Theology and Anthropology: An Awkward Relationship"[1] and contrasts its approach with some recent work by Timothy Jenkins.[2] I read both anthropologists as bearers of the legacy of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). Robbins and Jenkins are described here as reprising Hegel's account of the struggle of Enlightenment against superstition, but in different ways.

Robbins in his essay is concerned with a normative account of the relationship between theology and anthropology. He suggests that each discipline mocks the other. In brief summary, theology addresses a community of readers with an expectation of transformation of life but struggles persuasively to show an alternative social ontology. Anthropology persuasively demonstrates alternative social ontologies but has no community of readers whose lives its descriptions might transform.

The focus of my remarks will be the parallelism between Marilyn Strathern's own awkward relationship essay and Robbins' extension of its scope to an engagement with theology. Each case has a disciplinary strength and a weakness on each side, with each discipline having the capacity to compensate for the weaknesses of the other.

Strathern's "An Akward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology" attempted to chart the ways in which the interests of feminist writing and that of anthropologists overlap and diverge from one another. Strathern's inquiry is motivated by the perceived failure of feminism to transform anthropology. She investigates the question of what counts as transformation, especially the terms of the still then-fashionable idea of

paradigm shifts and the requirement that a theoretical transformation means an identifiable change in the framework of inquiry, and considers what makes feminist inquiry distinctive with a familiar division between distinctive objects, namely women's agency, and distinctive methods, namely the researcher's relation of solidarity to those studied. Strathern suggests that because anthropologists already investigate women and because the discipline already has a proliferation of frameworks, it is difficult to identify any particular nameable theoretical transformation whose causes could readily be identified with feminism is difficult. Feminist anthropology can be "tolerated as a specialty that can be absorbed without challenge to the whole."[3] Strathern is more interested in the distinctive relation of solidarity to the women who are the subject matter of feminist inquiry. For Strathern, both feminism and anthropology promote difference: for feminism it is between men's and women's interests; for anthropology it is between the researchers' and the informants' ways of making sense of things. Anthropology and feminism mock each other "because each so nearly achieves what the other aims for as an ideal relation with the world." [4] Anthropology sustains the otherness of the informants' world but desires that the evocation of this world be an enterprise shared by anthropologist and informant. Feminism mocks this pretention by drawing attention to the different interests of the two.[5] Feminism produces a shared enterprise (the interests of the researcher and of the subject of study converge) but desires to sustain the difference of a feminist viewpoint from that of the wider patriarchal society. Anthropology mocks this desire by drawing attention to the fact that any feminist construction of subjectivity is undertaken "within the sociocultural constraints of their own society" and is only meaningful because this is so.[6]

It is worth naming the fundamental categories in play in Strathern's claim about feminism and anthropology's mutual mockery. The two to which Robbins draws attention in his interpretation of Strathern's essay are "real community of interest" (feminism) and

"distance from their own society" (anthropology).[7] In Robbins' brief account of Strathern, feminism sustains community but struggles to achieve distance, while anthropology sustains distance but struggles to achieve community. It is a nice chiasmus.

This thesis, and almost exactly this same formulation, has a long history. To understand it, and thus to see why it has such force for Robbins, one can tell a little story about Hume and Hegel.

The most famous articulation of this chiasmus (community without distance, distance without community) is in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, about 350 pages into the book in the late discussion of "Spirit". Its location in the text is significant because it falls into that part of the work philosophers tend not to read, given their much greater enthusiasm for the earlier parts that concern epistemology. Hegel's discussion is titled "the struggle of the Enlightenment against superstition."[8] Hegel takes up Hume's contrast, without attribution, between superstition and enthusiasm or, as they are more normally named, Catholicism and Protestantism in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" published in 1777.[9]

Hume describes superstition as a response to fear of the unknown manifested in "ceremonies, observances, mortifications, sacrifices, presents, or in any practice, however absurd or frivolous."[10] Enthusiasm, by contrast, is a product of the confidence and presumption that accompany prosperity: 'The inspired person comes to regard himself as a distinguished favourite of the Divinity."[11] It is a rhetorically pleasing contrast.

Hume makes three succinct points. First, superstition elevates the authority of priestly institutions, whereas enthusiasm has "a contempt of forms, ceremonies and traditions."[12] Second, superstition starts out "gradually and insensibly" but then, when holding the balance of power, acts tyrannically and destructively to the extent of unleashing the violence of the Thirty Years' War to maintain that power. Enthusiasm takes the opposite path: it starts out

violently in revolt, but then calms down and leads to a generation of free thinkers. Third, "superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it."[13]

Hegel cannibalizes this account for his own purposes. In Hegel's much longer account, the feature upon which he seizes is the way in which faith inherits a habitable world. It is a domain of received certainties that structure ordinary and largely unreflective life: "In its certainty, faith stands in an unencumbered relation to its absolute object [i.e., God]. It is a pure knowledge of that object, and it never lets letters, paper, or copyists interfere with its consciousness of the absolute essence."[14] This is contrasted with the pure insight of the Enlightenment, which in its pursuit of truth is corrosive of tradition and which single-mindedly pursues freedom to the point of existential emptiness. In Strathern's idiom, faith mocks the Enlightenment with its real community; Enlightenment mocks faith with its spirit of free inquiry.[15] Much more can be said about this fascinating discussion, and I have written on it elsewhere.[16] The main point here is Hegel's development of the chiasmus. Faith has community without free inquiry; Enlightenment has free inquiry without community.

Hegel challenges the self-perceptions of both perspectives. Like Hume, who draws attention to enthusiasm's friendliness towards liberty, but developing the idea further, Hegel argues in some detail that Enlightenment's freedom of inquiry is an historical development of the impulses of the Reformation. For Hegel, the anti-institutionalism of the Reformers moulds the intellectual habits and available shapes of thought found in more developed forms in the Enlightenment. The Reformers dared to think for themselves against received Catholic doctrine, and the Enlightenment champions dared to think for themselves against religion *tout court*. Both camps have a common root: Enthusiastic faith and Enlightenment are children of the Reformation, just as Reformation and counter-Reformation are children of unstable late scholastic settlements.

On the face of things, and in Robbins' narration, it looks as though Strathern reproduces this chiasmus, which, in turn, facilitates Robbins' extension of it to the relation of theology and anthropology. There are obstacles that stand in the way of this perspective, however.

Strathern does not actually talk about real community: " real community of interest" is Robbins' gloss. Her own formulation is somewhat thinner. "Feminist scholars can claim substantial interests in common with the people they study. They may be speaking woman to woman, or else have a common ground in understanding systems of domination."[17] A "community of interest" (Robbins' term) is furthermore probably not what is typically meant, at least in theological writing, by community. The richer theological sense of community is, I suppose, precisely the kind that Robbins finds attractive in such writing. On the anthropological side, Strathern certainly talks of "breaking with the past"[18] as well as "distance and foreignness [that] are deliberately sustained."[19] These seem close enough to Hegel's characterisation of Enlightenment impulses.

For Strathern the chiasmus is decidedly more uncertain, however. The feminist, not the anthropologist, has "the need to expose and thereby destroy the authority of other persons to determine feminine experience,"[20] and the anthropologist, although not to exclude the feminist, has the distinctive aspiration to make "an effort to remain open to people's emotional and personal lives."[21] In Hegel's account, it is, to the contrary, the Enlightenment that destroys while faith resources ordinary lives. This does not trouble Strathern's account of the mutual mockery, but it makes her account messier to map on to Hegel's.

Robbins' summary of Strathern's discussion achieves a somewhat neater map by smoothing that account somewhat. Having stabilized the relation between community and distance, this can then be put to work on the relation of theology to anthropology. These remarks need some careful elaboration.

Robbins' *homage* to Milbank is elegantly stated. He proposes a parallelism between the awkward relationship of feminism to anthropology and that of theology to anthropology. We can focus on what theology offers anthropology, given the terms of our discussion. Feminists "find it easy to create a real community of interest between themselves and their subjects, something that is extremely difficult for anthropologists to accomplish."[22] Theologians, in a comparable fashion, display more confidence in their claims that different ways of conceiving and living life are so fundamental and compelling that their readers should change their lives.[23] Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* is offered by Robbins to his readers as a model of such confident and compelling writing.[24]

We can readily discern Hegel's chiasmus. Theology offers a community committed to being changed but struggles to demonstrate real difference; anthropology effortlessly shows real difference but struggles to find a community that might be changed. Anthropology has the tools of inquiry but no community; theology has the community but lacks the tools of inquiry. The reason for theology's struggle to demonstrate real difference is, I suppose, not its willingness to assert such difference, but its reluctance to undertake the detailed descriptions that would render these accounts plausible to a tough crowd. Robbins casts anthropologists as the tough crowd, with himself acting as their spokesperson.

There are at least three more immediate reasons why Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* might claim the attention of a social anthropologist such as Robbins. First, Milbank thinks historically and offers his critique of social theory as a contribution to the history of ideas. Robbins has consistently shown a deep interest in the history of his discipline and tends to understand its contemporary questions as the outcomes of previous shifts in perspective and inquiry. Second, Milbank engages directly with social anthropology and concerns himself with its fundamental categories and shapes of thinking. This was rare at the time of publication and, in some ways, arguably remains so. Although many theologians today often

engage anthropological literature, especially particular ethnographies and approaches, it is still unusual to find investigations of fundamental anthropological categories. Third, and overlapping with the second, Milbank accuses anthropology of resting on an "ontology of violence" and insists that *only* (a favourite term for Milbank) theology, with its ontology of peaceful difference rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity, can offer a social theory that changes lives for the better. Milbank's claim is vague: it is not clear whether the accusation touches all anthropologists all the way, certain tendencies in all anthropologists, or some tendencies in some anthropologists. One can nonetheless see why an anthropologist such as Robbins, who is sensitive to history, to suffering, and to the need to change lives, might be appropriately anxious about whether the charge sticks or at least is virtuously envious of an account that promises not only to diagnose a violent sickness but also to cure it.

There is a less obvious fourth reason: *Theology and Social Theory* is, itself, a retelling of Hegel's "struggle of Enlightenment against superstition."[25] Milbank, who knows Hegel's account well, perhaps via Gillian Rose, even if he does not acknowledge it, argues that secular social theory is, in fact, a development of theological tendencies that extend back into an earlier period. That is exactly what Hegel says about the Enlightenment's secularizing tendencies. Just as Hegel diagnoses the pure insight of the Enlightenment as a product of early Reformation anti-institutionalism, so Milbank diagnoses secular social theory as a product of heretical theologies. Milbank is not the first late-twentieth-century thinker to retell Hegel's thesis in this manner. He has rival contemporary versions of this retelling in Michael Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* and Amos Funkenstein's *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*.[26]

Robbins' "An Awkward Relationship" and Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* thus have a shared root in Hegel's work and further back in Hume's *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*. To anthropologists who read Robbins, judging from the many lively responses

to it, his account looks like a remarkable development where two opposed ways of thinking are brought into fruitful dialogue. To theologians who read Hegel, it rather resembles two rival developments of a Hegelian thesis about Enlightenment: Robbins via Marilyn Strathern; Milbank via Gillian Rose.[27]

I wonder if Robbins' envy of theology is, however, not so much misplaced as exaggerated. I also wonder if there are more suitable objects of a properly mitigated envy. I propose to build a case with two prongs. The first is a proposal that a bit of history is good but more history is better. This is because more uncertainties, contingencies, and hesitations are introduced. The second is a suggestion that important questions of scale are in play. I offer two essays by Timothy Jenkins as expert witnesses in this second prong: "Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity" and *The Life of Property*.[28]

First, the matter of history. Robbins shows great appreciation for Milbank's contribution to what he calls "alternative social ontologies."[29] It is indeed a powerful and persuasive vision. It is, however, worth drawing attention to a feature of the prose in which such alternatives are described. Milbank displays an embattled stance: medieval theology against modernity; Christianity against Islam; Aquinas against Scotus. This plays out conceptually in strong binary oppositions. It leaves little room for diagnosing rival tendencies in texts and thinkers and obscures overlapping influences, such as his own strongly Enlightenment (as Hegel narrates it) tendency to pursue pure insight, rescued from emptiness at or even after the last minute by invocations of Augustine, or his profoundly Nietzschean tendency to fight to the death, almost tempered by appeals to Aquinas' privileging of love. The alternatives are sharply posed for effect. This is achieved largely by staging gladiatorial combat with and between texts rather than narrating historical change and interpreting texts as symptoms of that change.

For Milbank the Platonist, ideas shape life. Ideas and texts are saturated with hope and danger. There is no cause to argue with this view as it stands. Clearly ideas do shape life. This insight is not errant so much as incomplete. Ideas shape life, in part, because they are, again in part, the conscious expressions of often unconscious forces, and it is those forces we must guess at. There are reasons why Scotus' ideas were ascendant in Paris in the 1600s, just as there are reasons why Aquinas' ideas were ascendant in Rome in the 1900s. Both are fundamental developments for Milbank. It is surely a matter of historical inquiry to discover, or at least to test hypotheses about, those reasons. As Collingwood, another student of Hegel, persuasively insists, texts are answers to questions, and questions are posed in response to changing circumstances.[30] Milbank tends to be interested in the answers to questions more than in naming the questions themselves, and certainly more than in the changing circumstances to which questions are responses. This is curious and unsatisfactory if the aim is to change circumstances. I shall try, without degenerating into exaggerated and fruitless critique of Milbank, to diagnose this unsatisfactoriness more precisely later.

In Milbank's defense, it must be said that there is a reluctance among many historians to see it as their business to change circumstances, and many historians wear that reluctance as a badge of honor. There is quite an "awkward relationship" between history and theology to be explored, and I would anticipate that Milbank would rightly feature, and prominently, in that exploration, too. Nonetheless, if changing circumstances is our business, as it is for Robbins, and if ideas are our tools, it is reasonable to suppose that a more energetic historical interest is required. There are generative models of this in such figures as Hume, Hegel, and Collingwood who very noticeably devote time discussing the circumstances in which ideas arise and mutate, alongside the practical social action that they propose to their readers.

Second, the matter of scale. Much is at stake here, and I turn to the work of Timothy Jenkins to illuminate it. To get a sense of the intellectual engine that drives Jenkins'

notoriously understated work, it is advisable to read his second and third books: *An Experiment in Providence* and *The Life of Property*.[31] Jenkins has a well-developed readership for each, but almost none for both. There is good reason to consider them together.

An Experiment in Providence is a miscellany of short think pieces and sermons. There are 18 of them over 140 pages; many are *ristretto* short. They are written primarily for a readership concerned with how to articulate faith in the light of contemporary questions but in a style intended to permit other interested parties to listen in. The ancient genre they most resemble is perhaps the pastoral epistle: written for a community so that it might repent of its evil and deepen its faith. It is, thus, a good candidate for addressing those whom Robbins' calls "readers [who might] . . . let these differences transform their lives."[32] It is also extremely funny in parts, punctuated by grim humour and wry observations on human idiocy. In the essay "Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity," which I shall discuss shortly, Jenkins vigorously interrogates the prevalent idea that religious faith in Europe is a thing of the past, or at least on the point of being abolished under the pressure of modernity.[33]

The Life of Property is an ethnography of part of the Pyrenees, with a focus on family structures and transmission of goods across generations. Its thesis is that while it is difficult to identify the causes of change in these structures and modes of transmission, a good case can be made that they are, in part, the outcomes of intersecting legal codes whose relations alter over time. Shifts in the meaning of fundamental concepts—most centrally *the house*—express but also bring about such change. Jenkins notes a curious feature of his predecessors' accounts of life in this region of France: observers repeatedly claim it is about to disappear because of pressures by modernity on traditional habits of thought and action. "Being about to disappear" is, it seems, an almost permanent hazard for the Pyrenean house. Jenkins demurs. It does better justice to the reported phenomena, he proposes, to see the house as a (perhaps surprisingly) mobile expression of different forces: national and local laws, urban

and rural life, newcomers and established families. Constantly adapting, rarely transparent, it forces its ethnographers to guess at the forces of whose passing resolutions it is the effect. Echoing Hegel's insight from *Philosophy of Right* that ethical clarity is achieved only at the moment when what is taken for granted starts to break down, Jenkins suggests that the moments of "maximal definitional intensity" of local values are the large farming families whose children prefer city life and whose marriages throw the transmission of property into doubt.[34] It is when the city comes to town that one truly sees the town.

In two contrasting genres—the pastoral epistle and the ethnography—a similar errant tendency is identified and challenged: the narrative of decline. Various actors, including religious folk, have a tendency to claim that religion is in decline. Various observers, including anthropologists, have a tendency to claim that the old life in the Pyrenees is in decline. Jenkins observes that narratives of decline are themselves surprisingly durable. In the case of Béarn, he offers the reader the comic spectacle of generation after generation of intellectuals visiting the place to taste its delights for the last time and to pronounce its imminent demise: a sort of restaurant at the end of the universe. Likewise, everyone knows or fears that religion is on the point of collapse, yet here it is, unto this day, sufficiently audacious as to think that even anthropology should be theologically engaged.

Jenkins offers an alternative. Developing a metaphor from Darwinian biology he proposes that we think in terms of adaptation rather than decline. Developing a metaphor from Newtonian physics, he proposes that we consider adaptation in terms of forces. And borrowing a central theme from Collingwood's *Essay on Philosophical Method*, he proposes that we consider the scale at which concepts and categories operate.

Jenkins' "Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity" provides the answer to two questions: first, what is distinctive about Anglicanism and, second, does it deserve to be taken seriously? It opens with a discussion of the narrative of religion's decline and

characteristically moves immediately to differentiate scales of perspective within which this narrative might play out. They are three.

The first is small-scale everyday life. It is a local scale. From the perspective of the churchgoer, life goes on in broadly good order: "Aspects of life make sense, the local church makes a difference, individuals come to faith, people try to live decent lives, and so forth."[35] The second is a broader scale: "The world appears to be full of forces that are indifferent to faith. . . . There is an unfocused anxiety about what we might call the plausibility of faith, even for believers (or especially for believers)."[36] The third is a vast scale: "There seems to be, against the second view, a belief in the ultimate goodness of the universe . . . [even among] people who appear indifferent to the specific claims of the Christian faith."[37] If one takes seriously the different outcomes to the question of decline, depending on the scale at which the question operates, one quickly produces a complex picture. This is typical of Jenkins' reasoning in both books. We have, then, three scales: the everyday, the broader, and the vast. I propose to name these the *local*, the *middle distance*, and the *cosmic*.

This complex picture is then immediately reduced, while preserving the complexity, to contrasting theological terms: People see the world as a theater of potential for good and evil with the promise or threat of salvation or damnation. As a rhetorical strategy (in Robbins' terms, "to point to wholly different ways of living"[38]), this is striking. The purpose is to wean the reader from doom and move him or her on to complexity, but in terms that can be readily digested.

This complex picture then invites an historical question: whence this complex view? Jenkins offers an historical account whose contours and basic categories have a good deal in common with Hume's essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," already mentioned.[39] Jenkins briefly tells the story of the seventeenth century wars of religion with his characteristic persistent reduction to primordial terms, again with the aim of preserving complexity in

digestible form. For Jenkins, following George Duby, the fundamental categories in play are order, freedom, and flourishing. Order is expressed primarily in institutions and laws; freedom is expressed primarily in actors' capacity to act in ways not determined by such institutions and laws; and, flourishing is expressed in lives well led. The birth of the modern world is, for Jenkins, a change from one settlement in which order, freedom, and flourishing were relatively stable, namely feudalism, through a period of bloody and exhausting transition, during which this stability broke down, to a new Westphalian settlement of stability. In this account the freedom and the flourishing are not the major objects of change. It is rather the institutions and laws that undergo significant mutation. With Hume, according to the second of his three succinct points rehearsed previously, Jenkins sees the breakdown of the feudal system as a failure of religion: the hopelessly violent attempt by one institution—the Church—to assert its order over and against others' freedoms.[40]

Running through Jenkins' account is a question of hierarchy in relation to order, freedom, and flourishing. Times are hard when these three forces jostle for supremacy, especially when either order or freedom wins out; life is good when order and freedom contend with one another under the aegis of flourishing. And in Jenkins' typically conservative vision, life is especially good when there is an absolute commitment to flourishing, an abundance of order, and just enough freedom.

Jenkins displays a point of view that contrasts strongly with Milbank's. The Peace of Westphalia was not negotiated via a competition between "alternative social ontologies" but was the outcome of what Jenkins calls pragmatism: "See what will work, rather than being guided by tradition or by 'ultimate questions.'"[41] I wish here to draw attention to the contrast in approach to ultimate questions (Jenkins) and alternative social ontologies (Milbank). I take ultimate questions and social ontologies to be roughly equivalent, at least in terms of their scale. For Jenkins, human flourishing was achieved in that period precisely because

alternative social ontologies were not the deciding factor. The battle of ideas is never won, and the body count piles up. Modernity was born, Jenkins suggests, when actors decided together to suspend the battle of ideas and to agree on a settlement based on "what will work". In other words, this settlement was achieved when the scale at which thinking and action played out moved from the cosmic to the middle distance, in terms of theology, and from the middle distance to the local, in terms of what accommodations were made on the ground in particular communities. It is worth noticing that for Milbank the theatre of conflict is and should be shifted back towards the cosmic scale.

Anglicanism, for Jenkins, is the most pragmatic expression of this spirit of pragmatism. Or, it is the paradigm for introducing multiple scales as a repair of tendencies to operate solely at the high end of the scale. Anglicanism is not guided primarily by ideas, and it is not the victory of one fundamental ontology over its rivals. It is a settlement in which competing ideas, and incompatible ontologies, can go on together. But it is not a bare pragmatism. It also labors under a confession of idolatry: What will work is not the highest good. Only God knows what that is, and if our pragmatic vision displaces this acknowledgement, corruption and suffering once again gain the upper hand.[42]

I offer here a brief note for Anglicans and their observers. Jenkins' proposals for understanding Anglicanism as a settlement more than a theology have some important implications for understanding his (and my) tradition. It aligns more closely with Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Later Reformation in England 1547-1603* and *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* and with Mark Chapman's *Anglican Theology* than with attempts to identify what makes Anglican theology distinctive, such as Stephen Sykes' *Unashamed Anglicanism* or Samuel Wells' *What Anglicans Believe* , or those which seek to articulate its coherence, such as Sykes' *Integrity of Anglicanism* or Rowan Williams' *Anglican Identities* (these two written thirty years apart, and the latter in 2006, in the middle of the breakdown of a common

Anglican vision).[43] Put differently, it privileges the categories used by historians more than those used by theologians. This appears to be a dual concern: with historical settlements as well as historical doctrines; but it significantly mitigates the latter's dominance in many conceptions of what Anglicanism might be. But it can also be thought of as a stress upon intellectual work at the local scale, alongside the cosmic but again strongly mitigating its intellectual hegemony in theology.

Jenkins' view is unfashionable in theology today, so for good measure he makes it thoroughly explicit. In the spirit of Nicholas Lash, but also showing the influence of Daniel Hardy, he insists that theological confidence cannot be the basis of political settlement. To spell this out, as he does not, concerns on the cosmic scale do not straightforwardly shape concerns at the middle distance or on the local scale. It is on the contrary a willingness to face up to theological uncertainty that must underpin a commitment to others' flourishing. This is a matter of the appropriate scale for action and knowledge. The human scale, as contrasted with the divine scale, is limited, temporary, and provisional. This is accompanied by Jenkins' clear-eyed acknowledgement of the unpopularity of his proposal: "More 'principled' Christian churches tend to regard this pragmatism with suspicion, and sometimes disdain."[44] That is putting it mildly.

The rest of Jenkins' essay develops further proposals for considering the scale of action and knowledge and for understanding the relation among order, freedom, and flourishing. Most of its effort is devoted to outlining the kind of order that Anglicanism promotes, and this turns out to be, in large part, a matter of daily worship at a local scale rather than a battle of ideas at a cosmic scale.

A quick ending of this discussion might be sharply to point out the difference between Milbank's advocacy of an alternative social ontology as the basis for political settlement and Jenkins' advocacy of pragmatism tempered by checks on idolatry and a suggestion that

Robbins might find Jenkins' approach more conducive to a desire to change our circumstances. It seems to me worthwhile to blunt this sharp contrast, however, using Jenkins' own Collingwoodian tools and to cast this whole matter itself as a question of scale.

Jenkins offers three scales of operation of ideas: the local, the middle distance, and the cosmic. Milbank's alternative social ontology, its vision of a wholly other way of life, operates somewhere between the middle distance and the cosmic. It is large-scale stuff, and it is the feature that arguably intoxicates the young. Jenkins' proposals, by contrast, work on all three levels. Its concern with idolatry operates on a cosmic scale; its proposals for political settlement operate in the middle distance; and, its concern with daily prayer operates on a local scale. This seems to me to be of great interest and to offer a more fruitful way of repairing Milbank's highly stimulating theology than the familiar, rather sterile, attacks and defenses that his work often seems to invite. One can appreciate Milbank's work while drawing attention to its one-sidedness or incompleteness.

I return, then, to the question of Robbins' exploration of the awkward relationship between theology and anthropology. How awkward is it, really? I want to suggest that in one respect it is not awkward in the slightest and that, in another, it is far more awkward than he imagines.

When considering the chiasmus—theology has transformable community but struggles persuasively to articulate alternative social ontologies; anthropology persuasively articulates alternative social ontologies but struggles to find a community to be transformed by them—I think Hegel's original offers some useful pointers. Faith and the enlightenment, to use Hegel's terms in the chiasmus, have a common root: Enlightenment lacks community precisely because it has exaggerated certain features of Protestantism that unleashed freedom of conscience against ecclesial order. Its pursuit of pure insight is, in other words, not simply a mistake. It is more a one-sided and, crucially, forgetful development of a tendency of which

one can make sense if one knows some religious history: a Catholic Church violently imposing its order gave rise to violent bids for freedom. This unleashed not only war, which was bloody and short-term, but also a monstrous anti-institutional impulse, which was corrosive and long-term. The repair of this situation, Hegel suggests, is to revisit the relation between community and reason or, in Jenkins' terms, order and freedom, and integrate what has been put asunder. Hegel, like Jenkins, privileges flourishing, which he typically calls love. Both Hegel and Jenkins are emphatic about the centrality of institutions. There is no great awkwardness if theology and anthropology are understood in these terms, with a common root. There will be much work to do in both disciplines, and if Robbins is right, it will presumably mean theologians becoming more competent historians in order not only to insist upon but to demonstrate the radical otherness of its own tradition. It will also mean anthropologists embracing the communities of imagination to which they are intellectually, as well as socially, the heirs and to whom they may have the confidence to speak.

When it comes to imagining the practical effects of these proposals, however, it seems to me that certain kinds of awkwardness are stubbornly persistent. Robbins generously imagines that anthropologists can learn from theologians' boldness of vision and the confidence with which they address their communities in the expectation of social change.

But the lesson here is that one needs to pay attention to scale. If theologians are expressing a boldness of vision at a scale somewhere between the middle distance and the cosmic, it is likely to be inspiring but will very likely operate only at that scale. This is, in Jenkins' terms, the realm of anxiety and reassurance rather than the arena of local action and everyday virtues. To be effective, in the way that Robbins anticipates, theology would need to operate intellectually on a more local scale. And for that, one will need to look further afield than Milbank, as he himself would cheerfully admit.

In closing, let me try to recast the Hegel's chiasmus in an alternative form, changing it into an hypothesis that might bear testing in various ways. Theology and anthropology stem from a common root, for us, just as faith and Enlightenment stem from a common root for Hegel, but there is a certain one-sidedness in their developments from that root. Anthropology arguably tends to operate at two scales: the local and the middle distance. It concerns itself locally with ordinary lives but also demonstrates more broadly the alternative social ontologies that these lives embody. Theology has also tended to operate at two scales, too, but they are not the same ones: the middle distance and the cosmic. It concerns itself with alternative social ontologies expressed doctrinally in accounts of church, mission, and ethics. But it also concerns itself more cosmically with breathtaking visions of creation, redemption, and hopeful vitality extending beyond the last things.

If anthropology mocks theology, it is for its failure to operate at the local scale. This might mean its failure to do justice to daily worship, to disciplines of prayer, to the everyday service in community that discipleship requires. Doubtless one can find a few theologians to mock in this regard. (And a few, including Jenkins, whose work resists such mockery.)

However, if theology mocks anthropology, is it for its failure to operate at the cosmic scale? This would mean anthropology's failure to do justice to the encompassing vision of the beginning and the end and the role of reconciliation in the meantime. It is a failure to inspire. This is not far off what Robbins says, but in my version, it is perhaps rather less compelling for anthropologists. For Robbins it is the identification of a community to receive a bold vision that is in view, but it is core to my account that a community whose practices operate at a local scale cannot plausibly be transformed solely by thinking, nor by thinking solely on a cosmic scale. Here, by contrast, theology's distinctiveness, and therefore its place in the chiasmus, lies in the identification of claims on a cosmic scale. Perhaps there are

anthropologists who might be receptive to being mocked in this way. I would be interested to meet them.

Notes

1. J. Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285–94.

2. T. Jenkins, “Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity,” in *An Experiment in Providence* (London: SPCK, 2006); *The Life of Property: Family and Inheritance in Béarn, South-West France* (London: Berghahn, 2010).

3. M. Strathern, “An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology,” *Signs* 12, no. 2 (1987): 276–292 (here 288).

4. Ibid., 286.

5. Ibid., 290.

6. Ibid., 290–91.

7. J. Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?” *Anthropological Quarterly* vol. 79, No. 2 (2006): 285-294

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. H. Clairmont and H. F. Wessels (Hamburg: Meiner, 1987), 357–79.

9. D. Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 73–79.

10. Ibid., 74.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 74-75

14. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 366. Translation by Pinkard.

15. Hegel also has a much embellished and indeed darkly humorous version of Hume’s account of superstition’s gradually increasing hold upon the imagination and the unleashing of its violence. Space inhibits its inclusion here.

16. N. Adams, “Faith and Reason,” in *The Impact of Idealism: Religion*, ed. N. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 194–218.

17. Strathern, “An Awkward Relationship,” 290.

18. Ibid., 286–87.

19. Ibid., 289.

20. Ibid., 288.

21. Ibid.

22. Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology,” 287.

23. Ibid., 288.

24. Ibid.

25. J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

26. M. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987); A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986). Buckley wrote a PhD thesis with a substantial component on Hegel; Funkenstein, like many Jewish intellectuals of his generation, was thoroughly-versed in Hegel.

27. Tracing this genealogy with more precision would be interesting. Perhaps an anthropologist with an interest in the history of ideas would be well placed to undertake this task.

28. Jenkins, “Anglicanism”; *The Life of Property*

29. Robbins, “Theology and Anthropology,” 292.

30. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), 29-43

31. Jenkins, *An Experiment in Providence* (London: SPCK, 2006);. *The Life of Property: Family and Inheritance in Béarn, South-West France* (London: Berghahn, 2010).

32. Robbins, “Theology and Anthropology,” 288

33. Jenkins, “Anglicanism.”

34. Jenkins, *The Life of Property*, 1970.

35. Jenkins, “Anglicanism,” 103.

36. Ibid., 104.

37. Ibid.

38. Robbins, “Theology and Anthropology,” 288

39. Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm.”

40. Jenkins, “Anglicanism,” 104

41. Jenkins, “Anglicanism,” 105

42. Ibid.

43. D. MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England 1547-1603* (London: Palgrave, 1990); *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale, 1998); M. Chapman, *Anglican Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); S. Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); S. Wells, *What Anglicans Believe* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011)*;* S. Sykes, *Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbray, 1978*;* R. Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Plymouth: Cowley Publications, 2003).

44. Jenkins, “Anglicanism,” 108.